

## **Andrew Pereny: The Potter of Pearl Street**

**BY JAMES L. MURPHY**

Ohio State University Libraries

Produced for only a brief period from 1933 to 1938, the art pottery of Andrew Pereny has become avidly sought by a few collectors but remains little known to most. Its scarcity accounts for both its collectibility and its unfamiliarity among collectors; its attractiveness and artistry suggest that its importance has been overshadowed by Pereny's work in ceramic engineering.



Pereny in his studio, 1937. (photo: Design Publishing Co., Columbus, OH).

Pereny was born in Manhattan, the son of Arnold Perenyi, who immigrated from Hungary in 1906 with his wife Mary and children Louis and Anna. Son Frank was born soon after their arrival, and Andrew in 1908. Arnold was later described as a "commercial artist" but in the 1910 census was listed as a house painter. At some point the "I" was dropped from the family name, possibly when they moved to Detroit, where Andrew attended school. By 1927 he was working for Flint Faience Tile, a subsidiary of AC Sparkplug in Flint, Michigan, as a designer and installer. By his own account he assisted in the design and production of the tile installation at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C., but unfortunately none of this tile work is visible in the renovated hotel today. No other specific individual tile designs have been attributed to Pereny.

While at Flint Faience, he was urged by a co-worker to attend Ohio State University to learn more about ceramics. This was undoubtedly John D. Whitmer, who was an OSU graduate in ceramic engineering and had worked at American Encaustic Tile in Zanesville before going to Flint Faience, where he remained until its closing in 1933. By that time Pereny had graduated from Ohio State with a B.F.A. in ceramic art, continuing in graduate school for a year but never obtaining an advanced degree. To help finance his way through college, Pereny began making

artware and ceramic sculpture in a small building on Pearl St. or Pearl Alley, a dozen blocks from the Ohio State University campus. Aided by his wife, Ruth Koons, a cardiologist whom he married in 1933 and who also helped her husband in the pottery, Pereny continued artware production. The ware was sold through prominent outlets such as Lazarus, J. L. Hudson Co., Macy's, and Gimbels, until 1938, when the company was sold to W I. Tyser.

According to Pereny, he learned ceramic engineering by osmosis. In 1935 he established the Pereny Equipment Company to manufacture custom-designed high temperature industrial furnaces and ceramic kilns, both electric and fuel fired. Realizing that developing innovations in this field was more profitable than making art pottery, Pereny continued to operate the company through World War II, during which he rose to the rank of Major. He also developed several patents, including a power-driven laboratory ball mill and a variable speed potter's wheel, as well



Pereny in his studio. From *The Ohio State University Monthly*, February 1935.  
Pereny trivet. 5 1/2 inch diameter.

as ceramic typewriter keys.

Much of Pereny's art ware is marked with a distinctive triangular logo, and a similar logo continues to be used by the Pereny Equipment Company to this day. Pereny used a simple scheme for shape numbering, with vases being numbered consecutively at least as high as V-34. A B-8 bowl is also known, but many pieces lack shape numbers. In addition to his orange to yellow flambé glaze, which is the most commonly seen, he used a variety of high gloss and semi-matt glazes, bright Egyptian blue, a light blue, a very light green, gun-metal, and a reddish-yellow ochre. A few pieces illustrate a problem with consistency of glaze thickness or pooling and even occasional fingerprints. Both white and red clays were used. While many pieces are hand thrown, others are molded, especially the more complicated figurines.

Pereny's hobbies and other interests included fishing, hunting, and sailing. These are reflected in many of his designs and motifs, including a fish-shaped ashtray, fish swimming around the sides of a small bowl, and a starfish-like geometric plate motif. Pereny also combined simple geometric elements with forms highly representative of Art Deco. Not all of his designs

appear to be original, particularly some of the molded figurines. A small "Trojan horse" figurine found in both red and white clay was probably based on or copied from a piece created by Edith Keeler, a Marion, Ohio, high school art teacher and exhibited with similar "critter" forms by Paul



Pereny guitar player. 10 inches high.

Bogatay, Chester Nicodemus, Ruth Randall and others in a 1933 issue of *Design* magazine. Keeler was a graduate of Denison University, and had no known association with either Ohio State University or Pereny, but the ceramic world in 1930s Ohio was a small one. A charming Pereny tile in the form of an eight-pointed star is decorated with an unmistakable rendition of Margaret Postgate's sculpture, "The Three Marys," and the spiral or "starfish" design on some Pereny plates also was foreshadowed by Cowan. Such artistic borrowings or influence scarcely detract from Pereny's own accomplishment, particularly when one remembers that his pottery studio was essentially a one-man operation. Another intriguing Pereny piece is an 8 inch high statue of a ballet dancer clearly impressed "Lucille Evely". Thus far the enigmatic Evely remains unidentified not only in dance and ceramics but even in the more prosaic and orderly world of city directories and census records. Andrew Pereny continued operating the Pereny Equipment Co. for more than forty years, well after the death of his wife Ruth in 1956. He served four terms as treasurer of the American Ceramic Society and was made a fellow of the Society in 1957. In 1960 he visited Peru as a consultant and there met his second wife, Dr. Bertha Bouroncle, a prominent oncologist, now emerita professor at Ohio State University. After 1938 Pereny never returned to producing ceramics. His years following retirement from the Pereny Equipment Co. included the management of investment properties, hunting and fishing, boating on Lake Erie, and operating a stock farm near Bellefontaine, Ohio. Andrew Pereny died December 30, 1983, a month past his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday.

**Acknowledgements:** Although Pereny once remarked offhandedly that he "figured some of his hand-thrown work remains in area homes," Dr. Bouroncle in fact retains a very impressive collection of his art ware. She kindly spent an afternoon reminiscing and allowing me to study and photograph many of the pieces.





Early Pereny  
turquoise vase  
dated 1932,  
wheel-thrown,  
9 inches high.



Pereny vase  
shape V-32.  
9 1/2 inches high.



Pereny vase  
shape V-14.  
6 inches high.



Pereny  
rectangular  
vase.  
6 inches  
high.



Pereny light blue  
vase, crystalline  
glaze, 9 1/4 inches  
high. No shape no.



Pereny green  
fan vase V-33.  
9 inches high.



Pereny deer.  
5 1/2 inches high.



Pereny bird candleholder  
4 1/4 inches high.



Pereny Dumbo figurine.  
3 1/2 inches high.



Pereny horse.  
5 1/2 inches high.



Pereny fish  
ashtray, red clay,  
5 inches long.



Pereny green elephant  
planter. 1 3/4 inches high.

